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AUTHOR Shea, Joseph
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ABSTRACT

Applicants for a teaching certificate in Florida must complete a year-long internship and demonstrate mastery of twenty-four selected competencies. To accomplish this goal, a building-level support team system has been developed. Three members comprise the team: a peer-teacher, a building-level administrator, and at least one other professional educator. A key feature of the program is reliance upon a written plan, developed by the beginning teacher with the support team, which serves as a guide for professional development and demonstration of mastery of the minimum essential competencies. An observation/conference procedure is used to document the teacher's progress and verify whether or not the teacher's performance is satisfactory. All members of the support team carry out at least two formative evaluations and observations, which provide the beginning teacher with feedback on strengths and weaknesses in classroom performance. Upon completion of the program, a statement is issued giving the support team's recommendation on granting or withholding certification. A review and appeal procedure is available in cases where certification is not recommended. (JD)

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THE NEW FLORIDA BEGINNING TEACHER PROGRAM

Dr. Joseph Shea
Associate Professor of Education
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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The New Florida Beginning Teacher Program

Florida is currently embarking upon a statewide program of inservice teacher education in which school districts assume responsibility for providing its first-year teachers with the assistance needed to enable them to master the necessary skills to ensure their effectiveness in teaching. Now in its first year of operation, the Florida Beginning Teacher Program is based on the belief that student learning will be increased with the provision of a regular planned system of support, assistance and feedback for teachers who are beginning their careers in Florida. The purpose of this article is to review the development of the Beginning Teacher Program in Florida and present a description of its essential features.

Reflecting a desire to improve the competence of teachers the Florida legislature has demonstrated an active interest in the professional training and certification of teachers. A direct outcome of this interest was manifested in the 1978 enactment of State Bill 549 which set minimum entrance and exit requirements for prospective teachers. Under the provisions of SB 549, admission to teacher education programs was now contingent upon the applicant's scoring at or above the fortieth percentile on a qualifying exam and, upon completion of degree requirements, the awarding of certification would require successful completion of a comprehensive written test demonstrating knowledge of essential teaching competencies.

The 1978 legislation also demonstrated an intent by the legislature to have preservice teachers begin their actual classroom participation as

early in their professional program as practicable. Of particular importance for this discussion was the stipulation that, beginning July 1, 1980, applicants for a teaching certificate in Florida would have to complete a year-long internship or give evidence of having completed three years of successful teaching out-of-state. Subsequently, the effective date for implementing the new year-long internship was advanced to July 1, 1982, and the state Department of Education was charged with the responsibility for the development of a state-wide program.

Another important factor in the development of the year-long internship was the result of a state-wide effort to provide clearer description of what it is that a competent and qualified teacher actually does. A concern of educators nationally and in Florida for most of the past decade, this effort had its beginning in this state when the Commissioner of Education appointed an ad hoc task force to take a critical look at teacher training, certification and professional practices. Representatives of the various professional associations and the Florida Department of Education probed these issues and pointed out the need for a statewide study to determine the criteria, standards, or indicators which may constitute desired teaching performance.

Acting upon this recommendation, the Commissioner charged the Council on Teacher Education (COTE) with the task of determining those basic and fundamental competencies that are essential and acceptable to classroom teachers and all other certificated personnel in Florida. Involving teachers, administrators and teacher educators from throughout the state, COTE surveyed the profession and identified a set of twenty-three competencies, since revised to include one additional competency, representing the

knowledge and skills deemed essential for teaching irrespective of subject matter or age of pupils.

Subsequently adopted by the State Board of Education, these twenty-four competencies have provided the framework for describing expected teacher performance. Currently these generic teaching competencies are proving to be useful guidelines for the ongoing effort to restructure requirements for certification and teacher training in Florida.

Later, when the legislature focused attention on the development of a year-long internship by making this a condition for regular certification, COTE sought recommendations from teacher education centers, school districts, and institutions of higher education for proposals and model programs incorporating the idea of a year-long internship. Under the leadership of the Department of Education, the model development grants submitted were field tested and a prototype program of teaching and internship emerged which was school-based and involved local school districts and college professionals in planning, scheduling and implementing district-level inservice activities suited to meet the needs of teachers in their first year of teaching in Florida.

Features of the Beginning Teacher Program

The heart of the Florida Beginning Teacher Program is the building-level support team. From the outset in planning the program it was recognized that the success of this new program would hinge upon how well teaching, administrative and university professionals could be bonded together into a cooperative working unit capable of providing the first-year teacher with a planned program of support, assistance and feedback. To accomplish this goal,

a plan was developed around the idea of having assistance provided on a building level basis by persons who were close enough to the teaching situation to be able to provide the beginning teacher with direction and feedback on a continuing basis.

The Support Team. The persons who work to implement this plan form the building-level support team which is made up of three members, a peer-teacher, a building-level administrator, and at least one other professional educator.

The peer-teacher is an experienced teacher who holds a valid regular certificate and teaches at the same level and subject or service area as the beginning teacher and is on continuing contract. As the person closest to the beginning teacher, the peer-teacher's role is one of mentor, confidant and guide providing help as needed in the development of teaching plans. The peer-teacher is also involved in the designing of the professional development plan and in making formative observations of the beginning teacher at work to diagnose and provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses.

The building-level administrator is a certified, school-based administrator who is usually the principal but may be an assistant principal who has been designated by the principal. As the chairperson for the support team, the principal schedules meetings of the team, assists in designing the professional development plan, observes the beginning teacher at work, maintains the portfolio and makes formative and summative evaluations and coordinates the final assessment of the beginning teacher's work.

The other professional educator, the third member of the support team, is a professionally trained and experienced individual whose role may include but is not limited to that of college/university educator, county-level

supervisor or administrator or staff development or curriculum specialist. As part of the support team, the duties of this person include observing the beginning teacher at work, attending scheduled meetings of the team, assisting with the development of the professional development plan, arranging for needed resources and support services and scheduling inservice activities and university assistance.

The support team is appointed by the building-level administrator within 20 days of the employment of the beginning teacher to the faculty of that school. The administrator notifies team members in writing of the formation of the team, their team role, and the time and place for the initial orientation meeting.

The Professional Development Plan. A key feature in the Beginning Teacher Program is the reliance upon a written plan developed by the beginning teacher and the support team to serve as a guide for the teacher's continued professional development in demonstrating mastery of the minimum essential competencies. Those competencies which have already been mastered are documented and attention is focused upon laying out a plan of action to demonstrate acquisition of the remaining competencies.

The plan should be developed as soon as possible after the teacher begins and must be completed within 40 days of the beginning teacher's employment. Competencies not demonstrated in the initial observations will be listed as objectives in the plan with the support team recording how and when these are to be reached. To assist the beginning teacher in acquiring these competencies, the support team may suggest activities such as inservice components, content area study, observation in other classrooms, visitations,

conferences and other similar assignments. The anticipated and actual completion dates for each competency to be demonstrated are noted with each member of the team signing the plan to acknowledge this schedule of activities. The professional development plan may be revised and updated at any meeting of the support team so long as the team as a whole approves the revisions.

Verifying Satisfactory Performance. The process of verifying whether or not the beginning teacher's performance is satisfactory involved the use of an observation/conference procedure to document the teacher's progress in demonstrating teaching skills and mastery of the minimum essential competencies targeted for development on the professional development plan. All members of the support team carry out at least two formative evaluations and conferences while the building administrator must in addition complete two summative evaluations and conferences. The formative observation and evaluations are used to provide the beginning teacher with feedback on the strengths and weaknesses in the teacher's classroom performance. The summative observations and evaluation provide the building administrator with information regarding the beginning teacher's ability in relation to the minimum essential competencies.

A portfolio is maintained for the beginning teacher by the building administrator as a means of compiling all of the documents which are accumulated throughout the year as the teacher works to complete the program. Documents which are included in the portfolio are the professional development plan for the beginning teacher, formative performance documentation by competency and subskill, summative evaluation materials including the

Superintendent's recommendation, a statement of the appeal procedure for beginning teacher, and provision for beginning teacher's exhibits.

Upon completion of the program by the beginning teacher, the building administrator completes a certification statement indicating whether or not the teacher has successfully demonstrated the knowledge and teaching skills required for regular certification. The certification statement and portfolio are then forwarded to the Superintendent for review and final action. After reviewing the portfolio materials and the recommendation of the building administrator, the Superintendent submits an official statement to the Commissioner of Education to verify that the beginning teacher either has or has not successfully completed the Beginning Teacher Program.

A review and appeal procedure is available to the beginning teacher in cases where certification is not recommended. In such cases the burden is with the beginning teacher to show that he or she has met the criteria for successful completion of the Beginning Teacher Program.